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SELECTED POEMS FROM  
*THE GODDESSES*

KUO MO-JO

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
PEKING

First Edition	1958
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TRANSLATED BY JOHN LESTER  
AND A. C. BARNES

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## *Author's Preface to the English Translation*

*The Goddesses* can be compared to a cicada newly emerged from the chrysalis of the old society as well as of the traditional Chinese poetry.

The collection was first published in 1921, most of the poems having been written between the years 1918 and 1921.

More than thirty years have passed by and China has undergone another great transformation. *The Goddesses* is now but an exuviae of the cicada.

The Foreign Languages Press has asked me to write something for their English translation of a number of the poems selected from *The Goddesses*. But what should I write?

In my view poetry is the music invoked from men's hearts by the age in which they live.

Viewed as literature, these poems may disappoint the reader. Let them rather be taken as recordings of the age in which they were written.

Kuo Mo-jo

July 1957

## *Rebirth of the Goddesses*

All things transitory  
But as symbols are sent;  
Earth's insufficiency  
Here grows to event;  
The Indescribable,  
Here it is done;  
The Woman-soul leadeth us  
Upward and on!

Goethe: *Faust*

A fissure in the Puchou Mountain: its walls rise abruptly. On either side tower up crags, formidable as the Yangtze Gorges, shaped by nature into the semblance of the gateway to a city. Beyond the crags a vast expanse of sea stretches away to merge with the sky. In front of the crags the level ground is carpeted with luxuriant emerald grass strewn with fallen fruit. Innumerable niches pierce the walls of the sentinel crags and in each niche stands the statue of a nude goddess bearing in her hands some form of stringed or wind instrument which she seems to be playing.

Strange trees grow profusely on the mountain-sides. Their leaves are like those of the date palm; the flowers are golden in colour, with calices like agate. The flowers are large as magnolias; the ripe fruits are shaped like peaches but somewhat larger. Over the summit of the mountain hang massy white clouds, hardly distinguishable against the sky.

The time is of the remote past, a day during the struggles for kingship of Kung-kung and Chuan-hsu. It is dark.

When the curtain rises, all is silent and the silence persists for some moments when distant sounds of clamour make themselves heard.

The goddesses lay aside their instruments and slowly step down from their niches. Slowly they look round them.

### FIRST GODDESS:

Since when the five-hued rocks were smelted  
to fill the cracks in the heavens  
darkness has been half driven away  
beyond the bounds of the celestial sphere.

Within this fair world  
strains of silent music have married in harmony.  
How many moons have waxed and waned,  
their light reflected on this wafted life-music?

SECOND GODDESS:

But why can we not bring into accord  
the measures we play today?  
I fear that in this universe  
a catastrophe is likely to come upon us again.  
Hark! This harsh clamour  
ever louder, ever nearer:  
is it from the waves in the sea, from wind in space,  
or can it be the counterpoint of evil cries?

THIRD GODDESS:

Were they not the barbarous hordes  
that passed by the foot of this very Puchou Mountain?  
They go, they said, to fight for some paltry hegemony;  
this turbulence has become intolerable.  
Sister goddesses, what are we to do?  
Our celestial canopy, built of five-coloured stone,  
may well be shattered in fragments.  
The weary sun merely sleeps in space,  
no longer shedding its burning waves of light.

FIRST GODDESS:

I will go forth and create new light,  
no longer will I remain a mere goddess in a niche.

SECOND GODDESS:

I will go forth and create new warmth  
to compound with your newly created light.

THIRD GODDESS:

Sister goddesses, new wine may not be contained in old skins.  
I will go forth and create a new sun  
to contain your new light and new heat.

CHORUS OF GODDESSES:

We will create a new sun,

no longer will we remain mere statues in niches.

*The goddesses dissolve into the sea beyond the mountain gateway. Behind the mountain rises the clash of embattled emperors.*

CHUAN-HSU:

I received Heaven's mandate;

Heaven appointed me to rule the world!

Kung-kung, do not let yourselves be caught up by the  
Spirit of Death;

let me establish my rightful place as leader.

KUNG-KUNG:

I know nothing about this rant of heaven and earth!

I follow my nature in my desire to be emperor.

If there is to be talk of the Spirit of Death, then I'll  
deal out death for you.

Chuan-hsu, you had better look out for your own skin!

CHUAN-HSU:

The ancients had a saying: there cannot be two suns in  
the sky, nor two rulers among the people.

Why do you press your rivalry to me?

KUNG-KUNG:

The ancients had a saying: there cannot be two rulers  
among the people, nor two suns in the sky.

Why are you bent on opposing me?

CHUAN-HSU:

Why, you . . . you mountain echo!

KUNG-KUNG:

I must satisfy my impulse to become ruler.

CHUAN-HSU:

But what necessity urges you to become ruler?

KUNG-KUNG:

Ask the sun — why must it shine?

CHUAN-HSU:

Then let you try your strength with me.

KUNG-KUNG:

And let you try your strength with me.

*Shouts of "War! War! War!" from the massed soldiery. Clamour of fighting, clashing of weapons, sounds of blood-spurting, thuds of falling bodies, thunder of trampling feet.*

OLD PEASANT (*bearing a ploughshare he makes his way across the battlefield*):

My heart's blood is quite dried up.

Battle has been joined again over my fields of corn.

When will the Yellow River run clear,

when will man's life come to an end?

SHEPHERD BOY (*guiding his flocks across the battlefield*):

Ah! I should not have reared those fighting dogs,

usually they fought over crusts of bread,

but when that was finished they ate heads of sheep.

I must take my sheep and flee.

*A horde of wild men enter. They are armed. They pass across the battlefield from the opposite direction.*

WILD MEN:

Let us make merry while the time favours it.

Let us go and join the battle beyond the mountain.

The hair bends whither the wind blows:

Whoever wins we stand to gain.

*Beyond the mountain is heard: "Long live Chuan-ksu! Long live the emperor!" Trampling of feet, cries of pursuit: "Traitors, you shall not escape. Heaven is about to strike you down!"*

*Kung-kung bounds forth from beyond the mountain at the head of his followers. His hair is shorn, his body tattooed, his loins garbed in plantain leaves. There are wounds on his body; his bronze sword and stone weapons are dripping with fresh blood.*

KUNG-KUNG:

Oh shame! Oh, horror! I am utterly defeated.

Would I had the old villain's skull

to carve into a wine-cup!

*He licks blood from his weapons and scowls with immense ferocity.*

Here is the northern pillar of heaven, the mountain of Puchou;

my life span has been cleft as is this mountain.

Comrades-in-arms, though I may not live to be king,  
I cannot make my peace with that old scoundrel.

You have depended on me up to now:  
now I have need of your lives.

*The followers pick up the fallen fruit and eat of it.*

The god of hunger is calling out from our stomachs!  
They say the magic fruit of Puchou gives unlimited  
strength to the eater:  
there is still a moment before the universe shivers  
asunder.

Go on, get a bellyful of it!

*The sound of pursuit becomes more and more insistent.*

The war-cries of the foe are like the fury of the  
breakers:  
they but hasten this helpless vessel to the bottom.  
My followers! Lend me your skulls!  
Crack this northern pillar of heaven!  
Crack it!

*The troops rush head foremost against the mountain wall. Thunder  
reverberates and lightning plays all round. Then, a great thunder-  
clap, the mountain splits apart and the vault of heaven crashes down.  
A black cloud billows up. Kung-kung's followers fall dead at the  
foot of the mountain.*

CHUAN-HSU (naked, his hair dishevelled, in build like a huge ape. He  
leads his men, armed like himself, from the battlefield):

Rebels, where do you think you will flee to?  
The gods strike swiftly! Great heavens, what is this?  
Rocks and stones fly through the air, the earth shudders, the  
mountain is bursting asunder.  
Aaaaah . . . ! All is chaos, chaos! What can be hap-  
pening?

*The thunder and lightning become more and more fierce. A flash  
of lightning reveals the bodies of Kung-kung, Chuan-hsu and their  
followers lying scattered about. After a while the thunderclaps be-  
come less violent and gradually die away. The whole stage is in  
darkness. Silence of five minutes.*

*Sound of swimmers approaching from afar. Women's voices in the darkness:*

- The thunderclaps have ceased.
- The lightning has died away.
- The battle of light and dark is over.
- What of the weary sun?
- It is driven out of the sky.
- Has the fabric of heaven been torn asunder after all?
- Have the forces of dark, once driven away, now crept back?
- What can be done with the rent fabric of heaven?
- Shall we smelt more coloured stone to repair it?
- Such coloured dross can serve no purpose now:  
however far it is set in decay, we should not patch it up  
again.
- Let our newly created sun issue forth,  
then will it shine through all the inner world and the  
outer.
- The limits of the celestial sphere serve no purpose  
now.
- But the new sun will surely become weary?
- We must be for ever creating new light and heat for  
it.
- Ugh! Everywhere underfoot are the remains of men's  
bodies.
- What shall we do with them?
- Bear them to the niches and mould them into gods.
- Yes and set them playing silent music as we once did.
- The new sun, my sister, why has it not yet risen?
- It burns too fiercely, we fear it will explode;  
we have it still plunged in the sea.
- Ah! We now feel new warmth.
- Our hearts are like crimson carp,  
leaping in a crystal bowl.
- We desire to embrace all things.

— Let us sing a song of welcome to the newly created sun.

*In Unison:*

Sun, although you are still far away,  
sun, although you are still far away,  
now the morning bell can be heard pealing in the sea:  
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

Ten thousand golden arrows shoot at the Wolf of Heaven;  
the Wolf of Heaven grieves in the dark.  
Now the funeral knell can be heard in the sea:  
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

We wish to quaff a stoup of wine.  
Drink to the everlasting life of our new sun.  
Now the drinking bells sound in the sea:  
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

*The stage suddenly lights up. Only a white curtain is to be seen.  
The stage-manager appears.*

STAGE-MANAGER (*bows to the audience*):

Ladies and gentlemen, you have become tired of living in the foetid gloom of this dark world. You surely thirst for light. Your poet, having dramatized so far, writes no more. He has, in fact, fled beyond the sea to create new light and heat. Ladies and gentlemen, do you await the appearance of a new sun? You are bid to create it for yourselves. We will meet again under the new sun.

### *Notes*

Material for the play has been taken from the following sources:

*Lieb Tzu* (ancient Taoist philosophical work): "... Heaven and earth are also material things, and things are subject to deficiencies. Hence in ancient times the goddess Nu-kua forged five-coloured rocks to fill in the cracks, and broke

off the turtle's feet and set them up as the four pillars of the sky. Thereafter, when Kung-kung struggled with Chuan-hsu for kingship, in his fury he threw himself against Puchou Mountain. He snapped this pillar of heaven and upset the balance of the four-cornered earth. As a result, the sky tilted down at the north-west corner, so that the sun, the moon and the stars now move in that direction. The earth being inclined in the south-east, all watercourses drain away thither."

*Shuo Wen* (the Han dynasty dictionary): "Nu-kua was an ancient goddess, who shaped the ten thousand things. . . . She first invented the pipes and flute."

*Shan Hai Ching* (ancient book of folklore and legends): "To the north, the Puchou Mountain faces Chupi Mountain, and Yuehchung Mountain is not far away; to the east it faces the salt marsh of Yu, which is where the Yellow River disappears underground after leaving its turbid, seething source. Here there are delicious fruits which are like peaches; the leaves are like those of the jujube tree and the flowers are yellow with a red calyx. These fruits can refresh one when one is fatigued."

## *The Nirvana of the Feng and Huang*

In Arabia in ancient times there lived a magical bird, the Phoenix. When it had reached the age of 500 years, it made a pyre of fragrant wood and committed itself to the flames. Then from the dead ashes it returned to life never to die again with a fresh and extraordinary beauty.

Now, this bird may well be the Feng-Huang bird of China. The Feng is the male, the Huang the female. In the *Yen Kung Tu* (Elucidation of the Illustrations of Confucius) we read: "The Feng-Huang is the essence of fire; it is born on Mount Tanhsueh." According to the *Kuang Ya* dictionary: "As to the Feng-Huang...the cry of the male bird is jig-jig, that of the female bird is jug-jug."

### *Prelude*

The eve of the new year is at hand and in the sky  
the Feng-Huang pair dart here and about.  
Mournful strains are heard as they fly away,  
bearing fragrant twigs in their bills they return,  
fly back to the Tanhsueh Mountain.

To the right is the withered plane tree,  
to the left the parched spring;  
before the mountain the limitless expanse of the sea,  
behind it the vast dismal plains,  
over the mountain the frozen sky traversed by icy winds.

The sky is now dark with evening,  
the fragrant wood is heaped high.  
The Feng is weary with flying,  
the Huang is weary with flying;  
their hour of death approaches.

The Feng pecks the twigs:  
points of flame fly out.  
The Huang fans the sparks:

wreaths of fragrant smoke rise up.

The Feng pecks on  
and the Huang fans the flame.  
The fragrant smoke overspreads the peak,  
the glow of the fire suffuses the peak.

The dusk has now deepened,  
the fragrant wood is burning.  
The Feng is weary with pecking,  
the Huang is weary with fanning:  
their hour of death is at hand.

Alas for the Feng and Huang!  
The Feng dances, dances high and low,  
the Huang sings, sings in tragic vein.  
The Feng dances,  
the Huang sings her song.  
The commonalty of birds flock thither,  
fly in from the skies to witness the death-rite.

### *Song of the Feng*

Jig-jig, jig-jig, jig-jig,  
Jig-jig, jig-jig, jig-jig.  
Vast is the universe, cruel as iron.  
Vast is the universe, sombre as lacquer.  
Vast is the universe, rank as blood.  
Universe, O universe!  
Why do you exist?  
Whence do you come?  
Where are you cradled?  
Are you an empty sphere limited in reach,  
or a continuum of unlimited size?  
If you are an empty sphere limited in reach

whence comes the space that contains you?  
What else has existence outside yourself?  
If you are infinite and all-embracing  
whence comes the space that you hold in yourself?  
And why does life exist within you?  
Are you a life-endowed flux,  
or are you a lifeless mechanism?

I raise my brow and ask of Heaven,  
but Heaven is reserved and aloof, has no knowledge of these  
things.

I bend my brow and ask the earth,  
but the earth is dead, it has no breath.  
I look out and ask the sea,  
but the sea is raising its voice in grieving.

Ah!

To exist in the mire and gloom of this world  
would cause even a diamond sword to rust.  
Universe, O universe,  
let me rail at you with all my powers:  
you blood-besmirched slaughter-house,  
prison surfeited with misery,  
graveyard clamorous with ghostly hordes,  
hell astir with capering demons,  
why should you exist at all?

We fly westwards:  
the west, alike, is a slaughter-house.

We fly eastwards:  
the east, alike, is a prison.

We fly southwards:  
the south, alike, is a grave.

We fly northwards:  
the north, alike, is a hell.

Living in such a world  
we can but learn from the lament of the sea.

## *Song of the Huang*

Jug-jug, jug-jug, jug-jug,

Jug-jug, jug-jug, jug-jug.

Five hundred years of tears have streamed like a cataract,  
five hundred years of tears have dripped like wax from candle.

Unceasing flow of tears,

filth that cannot be washed away,

flame of passion that cannot be extinguished,

shame that cannot be cleansed.

This shadowy life of ours,

towards what haven is it drifting?

Ah, this dreamy, shadowy life of ours

is like a lonely boat on an ocean:

to the right are trackless waters,

to the left are trackless waters.

No beacon shines ahead,

no shore is seen behind.

The sail is torn,

the mast broken,

the oars have floated away,

the rudder has rotted away.

The weary boatman merely sits and moans,

the angry surge rolls over in the sea.

Ah, this shadowy, drifting life of ours

is like a drugged sleep on such a dark night as this.

Before us is sleep,

behind us is sleep.

We come like a gust of wind,

we go like a whisp of smoke.

Coming like wind,

going like smoke,

sleep behind,

sleep before.

In the midst of this sleep  
we are but a fleeting breath of smoke.

Ah!

What sense is there in it?

What sense is there in it?

Folly . . . folly . . . folly!

There remains only grief, vexation, desolation, decay,  
a back-cloth for our living corpses,  
a thread running through the lives of our living corpses.

Ah!

Where is now the freshness of our youth?

Where is now the sweetness of our youth?

Where is now the splendour of our youth?

Where is now the pleasure of our youth?

Gone! Gone! Gone!

All is gone!

All must go!

We are gone.

You too must go.

Grief . . . vexation . . . desolation . . . decay.

Ah!

The fire flares dazzling bright,  
the fragrant smoke hangs heavily in the air.

My time has now come,  
my hour of death has come,  
all within us,  
all outside us,  
all in all.

Farewell! Farewell!

### *Choral song of the birds*

EAGLE:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!

In vain have you been the most magical of birds.

Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Henceforth must I assert my sway over the aerial world.

PEACOCK:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!  
In vain have you been the most magical of birds.  
Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Henceforth let you behold the royal sheen of my plumage.

OWL:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!  
In vain have you been the most magical of birds.  
Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Whence comes this sweet fragrance of mouse flesh?

PIGEON:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!  
In vain have you been the most magical of birds.  
Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Henceforth you may see the contentment of our docile tribe.

PARROT:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!  
In vain have you been the most magical of birds.  
Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Henceforth listen to the eloquent discourses of our orators.

STORK:

Haha! Feng-Huang! Feng-Huang!  
In vain have you been the most magical of birds.  
Are you dead? Are you dead?  
Henceforth see the strutting to and fro of our high-stepping  
race.

### *Rebirth song of the Feng and Huang*

COCKS:

The tide of dawn has risen,  
the tide of dawn has risen,  
the light that died is born anew.

The tide of spring has risen,  
the tide of spring has risen,  
the cosmos that died is born anew.

The tide of life has risen,  
the tide of life has risen,  
the Feng and Huang that died are born anew.

FENG AND HUANG SING TOGETHER:

We are born again,  
we are born again.

The one that is all is born again,  
the all that is one is born again.

We are he, they are me,  
you are in me and I in you:

I am therefore you,  
you are therefore me.

The fire is the Huang,  
the Feng is the fire.

Soar then, soar!

Sing for joy, sing for joy!

We are made anew, we are purified.

We are resplendent, we are steeped in fragrance.

The one that is all is steeped in fragrance,  
the all that is one is steeped in fragrance.

Fragrance steeped are you, fragrance steeped am I,  
fragrance steeped is he, fragrance steeped is fire.

Fire are you,  
fire am I,  
fire is he,  
fire is fire.

Soar then, soar!

Sing for joy, sing for joy!

We are pledged, we are deeply in love,  
we are devoted, we are truly matched.

The one that is all is truly matched,  
the all that is one is truly matched.

Truly matched are you, truly matched am I,  
truly matched is he, truly matched is fire.

Fire are you,  
fire am I,  
fire is he,  
fire is fire.

Soar then, soar!

Sing for joy, sing for joy!

We are vigorous, we are free,  
we are fearless, we are immortal.

The one that is all is immortal,  
the all that is one is immortal.

Immortal are you, immortal am I,  
Immortal is he, immortal is fire.

Fire am I,  
fire are you,  
fire is he,  
fire is fire.

Soar then, soar!

Sing for joy, sing for joy!

We sing for joy, we soar,  
we soar, we sing for joy!

The one that is all sings for joy,  
the all that is one sings for joy.

Is it you who sing for joy, or is it I?

Is it he who sings for joy, or is it fire?

It is joy itself that sings for joy!

It is joy itself that sings for joy!

Only joyfully singing,  
only joyfully singing!

Singing!

Singing!

Singing!

Draft: January 20, 1920

Revised: January 3, 1928

## *Coal in the Grate*

— Dedicated to my native land

Ah, my fair young maiden,  
I shall not betray your care,  
let you not disappoint my hopes.  
For her my heart's delight  
I burn to such a heat.

Ah, my fair young maiden,  
you must know of my former life.  
You cannot shrink from my coarseness:  
only in such a breast as mine  
could burn a fire so bright.

Ah, my fair young maiden,  
certain it is that in my former life  
I was a trusty pillar  
buried alive for years on end:  
today must I see the light of day again.

Ah, my fair young maiden,  
since I see the light of day again  
I think only of my native home:  
for her my heart's delight  
I burn to such a heat.

January-February 1920

## *Sunrise*

Fiery clouds girdle the rim of the sky  
like crimson dragons roving the air,  
like crimson lions, whales, elephants, rhinoceroses.  
Perhaps you are all outriders of Apollo?

And you, blazing headlights of motorcars,  
you twentieth-century Apollos,  
have you not changed your mount for a car?  
I would be your driver, will you engage me?

Ah! The vitality of light!  
Agate morning birds scatter before my eyes.  
Light and dark are divided with the clean cut of a knife.  
For light there are floating clouds, for dark there are floating  
clouds.

Both are floating clouds, why then dark, why light?  
I hold my gaze on the darkness of the clouds:  
all are dispersed by Apollo's potent beams.  
Then I saw that the cockcrows all about me have a deeper  
meaning.

March 1920

## *The Good Morning*

I greet you with a Good Morning,  
rolling ocean that knows no rest,  
shimmering glow of the rosy dawn,  
white clouds welling up like poetry from its source,  
silken rain-threads evenly drawn (language of poetry),  
crests over the sea burning with the fire of passion,  
morning breeze combing the soul.  
(Morning breeze, bear away my voice to the four quarters!)

I greet you with a Good Morning,  
my youthful homeland,  
my new-born kinsfolk,  
boundless reaches in southern lands of my Yangtze,  
frozen wastes in northern lands of my Yellow River.  
(Yellow River, may the ice-floes in your bosom thaw very  
soon!)

Thousand-league Great Wall,  
wilderness of snow,  
the Russia who inspires me with awe,  
the pioneer I hold in awe.

I greet you with a Good Morning,  
snow-capped Pamirs,  
snow-capped Himalayas,  
revered Tagore of Bengal,  
fellow scholars in the school of Nature,  
Ganges! Sacred light glowing on the Ganges,  
Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal,  
pyramids on the banks of the Nile!  
Da Vinci, so early your dreams of flight,  
*Thinker* of Rodin, seated before the Pantheon,

band of friends, half working half studying,<sup>1</sup>  
Belgium, people of Belgium, survivors of war,  
Ireland, poets of Ireland,  
Atlantic!

I greet you with a Good Morning,  
Atlantic, flanked by the New World,  
grave of Washington, of Lincoln, of Whitman,  
Whitman! Whitman! The Pacific that was Whitman!  
Pacific!

Pacific Ocean! Isles of the Pacific, ancient Fusang<sup>2</sup> lying in the  
Pacific,

O Fusang! Fusang still wrapped in dream.

Awake! *Mésamé*!<sup>3</sup>

Hasten to share in this millennial dawn!

January 1920

<sup>1</sup> Chinese students in France supported themselves by working, and studied in their spare time.

<sup>2</sup> Fusang: an ancient Chinese name for Japan.

<sup>3</sup> *Mésamé*: Japanese word for "awake."

## *Panorama from Fudetate Yama<sup>1</sup>*

Pulse of the great city,  
surge of life,  
beating, panting, roaring,  
spurting, flying, leaping,  
the whole sky covered with a pall of smoke:  
my heart is ready to leap from my mouth.  
Hills, roofs, surge on,  
wave after wave they well up before me.  
Symphony of myriad sounds,  
marriage of man and Nature.  
The curve of the bay might be Cupid's bow,  
man's life his arrow, shot over the sea.  
Dark and misty coastline, steamers at anchor,  
steamers in motion, steamers unnumbered,  
funnel upon funnel bearing its black peony.  
Ah! Emblem of the Twentieth Century!  
Stern mother of modern civilization!

June 1920

<sup>1</sup> Fudetate Yama: mountain in Japan west of Moji. Seen from the peak, the sea, land and ships are spread out as clear as if in the palm of a hand.

## *Shouting on the Rim of the World*

Endless tumult of angry white clouds,  
sublime arctic landscape.

The mighty Pacific gathers her strength to engulf the earth,  
the surging flood wells up before me:

unending destruction, unending creation, unending effort.

Ah, power, power!

Picture of power, dance of power, music of power, poetry of  
power, gamut of power!

September-October 1919

## *Three Pantheists*

I love our old Chuang-tzu<sup>1</sup>  
because I love his pantheism,  
because he got a living by making straw shoes.

I love the Dutchman Spinoza<sup>2</sup>  
because I love his pantheism,  
because he got a living by grinding lenses.

I love the Indian Kabir<sup>3</sup>  
because I love his pantheism,  
because he got a living by knotting fishing-nets.

<sup>1</sup> Chuang-tzu: philosopher of the fourth century B.C. One of the earliest of Taoist philosophers.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza: famous Dutch materialist philosopher (1632-77). Originally of the Jewish faith, he was expelled from the community for apostasy, and lived in poverty in The Hague.

<sup>3</sup> Kabir: Indian mystical poet (1440-1518).

## *By Electric Light*

### *I. Inspired by an old theme: Su Tse-ching<sup>1</sup> by Lake Baikal*

The electric lights are already shining,  
but why is there gloom in my heart?  
I pace, a lone figure, in the city;  
I think of Su Tse-ching on the shores of Lake Baikal.  
I see him with his white fleece on his shoulders,  
a felt turban on his head, felt shoes, felt gown,  
a solitary figure in the boundless Siberian steppes,  
behind him a snowy sea of sheep.  
I see him at dusk in early spring,  
waiting to return to the yurt,  
his background the frozen waves of Lake Baikal  
whose shapes mingle with the undulations of the clouds at the  
horizon.  
I see him moving eastwards,  
far away, looking towards the south, his head raised,  
his eyes charged with infinite sorrow,  
and yet as though there burned a thread of hope.

<sup>1</sup> Su Wu (here mentioned by his fancy name Tse-ching out of respect) was sent by the emperor Wu Ti of the Han dynasty, at the beginning of the first century A.D. as envoy to the Hsiung Nu. The chieftain tried to force him to go over, but he would not submit. He was sent to Lake Baikal, to a desolate area as a shepherd. He lived on wild animals and plants and married a local girl. After nineteen years he managed to get word through to a Chinese envoy that he was still alive, and returned to China.

## II. Before a painting, the Shepherdess of Millet<sup>1</sup>

The electric lights are already shining,  
but why is there gloom in my heart?  
I imagine Su Tse-ching's thoughts turning to home.  
I enter an art gallery from the street,  
I enjoy the late afternoon scene of Vierwaldstätter Sea;  
next I gaze on a waterfall in California —  
an ideal picture, a picture more than ideal.  
Person in the painting, surely you are a barbarian woman, yes  
a barbarian woman.  
A vast emerald plain brilliant with wild flowers  
unrolls before my eyes.  
In it stands a woman with a crook in her hand,  
at her back, homeward-bound, surges her flock of sheep.  
Such must have been the scene from which Su Tse-ching  
returned:  
his forsaken wife, his thriving flock.  
But the eyes of the shepherdess, those eyes . . .  
are they fraught with bitterness, with resentment or with de-  
spair?

## III. Portrait of Beethoven

The electric lights are already shining,  
but why is there gloom in my heart?  
I look at the painting by Millet,  
I again search through *The World's Great Painters*.  
The Mother, head of Jesus, girl hugging a pitcher . . .  
dance before my eyes.  
Ah! Beethoven! Beethoven! You dispel my nameless grief!  
Your dishevelled hair streams like swiftly flowing waves,

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<sup>1</sup> The painting is Millet's *La Bergère*.

your high white collar is like a snow-capped ridge;  
your leonine forehead, your tigerish eyes, .  
your brain which is like "the will of the Universe" itself.  
In your right hand a pen, in your left a manuscript,  
an angry torrent flows from the point of your pen.  
Beethoven! What are you listening to?  
It is as if I were hearing your Symphony.

Draft: end of 1919

Revised: February 1, 1928

## *O Earth, My Mother*

O earth, my mother,  
the sky is already pale with dawn;  
you rouse the child in your bosom,  
now I am crawling on your back.

O earth, my mother,  
you sustain me as I roam through the paradisiacal garden,  
and within the ocean  
you give forth music that soothes my spirit.

O earth, my mother,  
through past, present, future  
you are food, apparel, shelter for me;  
how can I repay the benefits you have bestowed upon me?

O earth, my mother,  
henceforth I shall seclude myself less indoors;  
in the midst of this opening up of waste lands  
I would fulfil my filial duty to you.

O earth, my mother,  
I am envious of your dutiful sons, the peasants in the fields;  
they are the nurse of mankind,  
you have always cared for them.

O earth, my mother,  
I am envious of your darlings, workers in coal-pits;  
they are the Prometheus of mankind,  
you have always cared for them.

O earth, my mother,  
I am envious of every blade or twig, my brothers, your progeny:  
freely, independently, contentedly, vigorously  
they enjoy the life bestowed on them.

O earth, my mother,  
I envy every living creature, the earthworm most of all;  
only I do not envy the birds flying in the air,  
they have left you to go their way in the air.

O earth, my mother,  
I do not wish to fly in the air,  
nor ride in carts, on horseback, wear socks or put on shoes,  
I only wish to go barefoot, ever closer to you.

O earth, my mother,  
you are witness to the reality of my existence;  
I do not believe you are the mere shape of a bubble conjured  
forth in a dream,  
I do not believe I am merely an imbecile creature acting without  
reason.

O earth, my mother,  
we are all I-yin,<sup>1</sup> born out of Kungsang;  
I do not believe that in the shadowy heaven above,  
a certain Father exists.

O earth, my mother,  
I think everything in this world are incarnations of your body:  
thunder is the breath of your might,  
snow and rain the upsurge of your blood.

O earth, my mother,  
I think that the lofty bowl of the sky is the mirror in which you  
adorn yourself,  
and that the sun by day and the moon by night  
are but your reflections in the mirror.

O earth, my mother,  
I think all the stars in the sky

---

<sup>1</sup> I-yin: a wise minister of the ancient Shang dynasty, a farmer of Hsinyeh, who was invited thrice to enter the service of the emperor Tang and did so finally. He led a punitive expedition against the tyrant Chieh and later ruled the whole empire. The accounts are of course at least partly legendary.

are but the eyes of us your creatures reflected in the mirror.  
I can only think you are the witness to the reality of existence.

O earth, my mother,  
my former self was just an ignorant child,  
I only enjoyed your affection,  
I did not understand, I did not know how to repay your affection.

O earth, my mother,  
henceforth I shall realize how loving you are;  
if I drink a glass of water, even if it is from Heaven-sent dew,  
I shall know it is your milk, my life-sustaining drink.

O earth, my mother,  
whenever I hear a voice speak or laugh  
I know it is your song,  
expressly provided to comfort my spirit.

O earth, my mother,  
before my eyes everything is in restless motion;  
I know this is your dance  
with which you wish to comfort my soul.

O earth, my mother,  
I savour every fragrance, every colour;  
I know they are playthings you have given me  
expressly to comfort my spirit.

O earth, my mother,  
my spirit is your spirit;  
I shall make my spirit strong  
to repay your affection.

O earth, my mother,  
henceforth I shall repay your affection;  
I know that you love me and wish to encourage me to work,  
I shall learn from you to work, never to stop.

December 1919

## Morning Snow

— On reading Carlyle's *The Hero as Poet*

Waves of snow.

A world all of silver.

My whole being is ready to resolve into light and flow forth,  
an *open secret*.<sup>1</sup>

Water dripping from the caves. . . .

Surely it is my life's blood?

My life's blood drips with muted cadence,  
in harmony with the waves of the sea, of the pines, of the snow.

Nature, how bold your sweep.

The *symphony* that is Nature.

*Hero-poet*.

*Proletarian poet*.<sup>2</sup>

December 1919

<sup>1</sup> *Open secret*: from a remark of Goethe quoted by Carlyle in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*:

"Fundamentally indeed they (Poet and Prophet) are still the same; in this important respect especially, that they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls 'the open secret.' 'Which is the great secret?' asks one — 'The *open secret*,' — open to all, seen by almost none!"

<sup>2</sup> The words in italics are in English in the original text.

## *Sea of Light*

Unbounded Nature  
has become a sea of light.  
Everywhere is life in pulsing light-waves,  
everywhere a new spirit in the air,  
everywhere poetry,  
everywhere laughter:  
a laughing sea  
and laughing hills,  
a laughing sun  
and a laughing earth,  
while I and Ah-ho, my tender shoot,  
laugh together in this world of laughter.

Emerald-green, a fir-tree  
beckons us with a smile.  
The sands, a sheet of silver leaf,  
invite us laughing to their embrace.  
We are here!  
Hug us, then!  
And in your bosom we shall bathe in light.

A crowd of school-children  
are skipping about in the sand:  
one throws a handful of sand,  
another laughs back at him;  
the first pushes the second one over,  
the other one sends the first sprawling.  
I am back in my boyhood of fifteen years ago.

Fifteen years ago  
I was a boy like you.

I lived at Kiachow<sup>1</sup> on the River Chingyi,  
at the school nestling at the foot of Mount Chihlo.  
The school that nurtured me!  
The sandy yard where I played within your care —  
does it still glow with its old radiance?  
Ah, I had a favourite school-friend then,  
I heard, alas, he died this year.

Comrade sworn to lasting friendship.  
Fragile as the early willow,  
your form still lingers before my eyes.  
Could your liberated spirit  
still be happily laughing at my side?  
When, at the parting of flesh and spirit,  
you remembered your friend beyond the seas,  
how many tears did you shed for him? . . .

Oh, that trim little stone lighthouse  
shining out over the sea.  
Ah-ho wants me to go up it;  
we climb up.  
The hills are on fire,  
silver dances on the waves,  
a line of sailing-boats  
seem to be slipping by in a mirror,  
so seem the clouds to slip by;  
and this — why, it is the image of life itself.

Ah-ho, where is the blue sky?  
He points to the azure expanse overhead.  
Ah-ho, where is the earth?  
He points to the islands in the sea.  
Ah-ho, where is Daddy?  
He points to a bird flying in the air.

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<sup>1</sup> Kiachow, or Kiating, the old name for the district of Loshan. It is in Szechuan, the native province of Kuo Mo-jo.

Aha! So I am that flying bird!  
I am that flying bird!  
Watch me outfly the white clouds,  
watch me race against the gleaming sails,  
and see who flies the higher,  
see who speeds the faster.

*Drunken Song Under a Flowering  
Plum Tree*

— Travelling in Dazaifu in Japan

Plum tree! Plum tree!  
I sing your praises! I sing your praises!  
You from your innermost self  
exhale your faint unearthly fragrance  
and put forth your lovely flowers.  
Flowers! Love!  
Quintessence of the universe,  
source of life!  
Were spring without flowers,  
life without love,  
what kind of a world would it be?  
Plum blossom! Plum blossom!  
I sing your praises,  
I sing the praises of myself,  
I sing the praises of the self-expressive universe.  
Is there really a you?  
Is there really a me?  
Is there really an antiquity?  
Are there really famous places in foreign climes?  
Every idol has been struck down before me!  
Down! Down! Down!  
I would snap my vocal chords in song!

## *Pacing Through Jurimatsubara at Night*

The ocean sleeps in peace.

Gaze into the distance, only a misty glow can be seen,  
not the faintest murmur of waves can be heard.

Ah, you spacious heavens, how lofty you are, how free, how  
mighty, how vast and serene!

Countless stars look down wide-eyed,  
their gaze fixed on the beauty of the night.

Countless pines in Jurimatsubara  
raise high their hands in silent adoration of the heavens;  
their hands tremble in awe against the sky;  
every fibre of my nerves trembles in awe within me!

## *I Am an Idolater*

I am an idolater;  
I worship the sun, worship mountain peaks, worship the sea;  
I worship water, worship fire, worship volcanoes, worship the  
great rivers;  
I worship life, worship death, worship light, worship darkness;  
I worship Sucz, worship Panama, worship the Great Wall,  
worship the Pyramids;  
I worship the creative spirit, worship strength, worship blood,  
worship the heart;  
I worship bombs, worship sorrow, worship destruction;  
I worship iconoclasts, worship myself,  
for I am also an iconoclast!

May-June 1920

## *Hymn to the Sun*

Glaucous ocean, clamorous breakers, eastward-running tide,  
with immense glow soon will emerge the new-born sun.

Cloud-islands in the sea of the sky are fire-fresh and smiling.  
Oh, if only I could level every obstacle to my view.

There it comes! There it comes! Crystal white circlet:  
endless golden threads fly from my pupils to the sun.

Sun! Standing on the water's edge, my back to the land, I fix  
my gaze on you.

Sun! Until you have pervaded me with your light I shall not  
turn away.

Sun! Shine on me for ever, do not turn away.

Sun! When I remove my eyes from you, all round me is dark-  
ness.

Sun! Make my entire life a flow of fresh blood.

Sun! Turn all my poems into a golden foam.

Sun! The cloud-islands in the sea of my heart are fire-fresh and  
smiling.

Sun! Hearken ever to the angry surge of my heart.

## *Footprints in the Sand*

### *I*

The sun shines from my right,  
casts the full shadow of my body  
on the sea to my left.  
The sandy beach holds many footprints of mine.

### *II*

The sun shines from my left,  
casts the full shadow of my body  
on the sea to my right.  
The sandy beach holds many footprints of mine.

### *III*

The sun shines at my back,  
casts the full shadow of my body  
on the sea in front of me.  
Do not, O sea, scour away my prints from the sand!

### *IV*

The sun shines in front of me.  
Sun, have you cast my full shadow  
on the sea at my back?  
Ah, the tide has long since washed away the footprints in the  
sand!

# *Pyramids*

## *I*

First one, then two, then three pyramid peaks  
range on the banks of the Nile — are these not the Nile banks?  
One high, one lower, the last lowest of all.  
The river banks below run on neat as a knife cut.  
Ah, those ripples in the river's flow, those rosy clouds surging  
behind the pyramids!  
A white blur of light shows through the clouds: it must be the  
westering sun;  
the sun has traversed the eastern hemisphere, it will now visit  
the western.  
The natural and man-made beauties must all have passed be-  
fore your gaze.  
No! No! Not so! It is the earth that is turning and circling  
you  
like a dancing girl approaching you.  
Sun! Symbol of the sun! Pyramids!  
Oh, that I might follow you in your course, fly towards you!

## *II*

On either side runs a line of sombre woods:  
between them flows a Z-shaped ribbon,  
flowing towards the foot of the cloud-lapped pyramids.  
Majestic solitude, deathly silence.  
I gaze bemused, I listen entranced. . . .  
The points of all three pyramids  
seem at the same time to be proclaiming in sonorous voices:  
Create! Create! Create with all your might!

The creative forces of man can rival those of the gods.  
If you will not believe, look upon us, we grandiose structures!  
Even the sun in the sky must bow, his head to us!  
Sonorous thunder, I am grateful for this your self-tested advice.  
The surging feelings in the sea of my heart have converged into  
a river that flows towards you.  
Surely that Z-shaped river in the woods must be me myself!

June-July 1920

## *Victorious in Death*

(Terence MacSwiney, the Sinn Féiner, a leader of the Irish Republican Army, was arrested by the British Government in the middle of August 1920 and imprisoned in Parkstone Jail. For seventy-three days he disdained to eat the English bread and died there on October 25.)

### *I*

*Oh! Once again to Freedom's cause return,  
The patriot Tell — the Bruce of Bannockburn!*

True depiction of "the sea of tears,"

gaunt forbidding pile: can it be the gateway to a prison, or the  
outside of a church?

A countless throng of young men kneel at prayer.

"MacSwiney, leader of the Irish Republican Army,  
cast into Parkstone Gaol fifty days ago and more,  
has spurned ever since the shameful English bread.  
We sons of Ireland, kneeling before this great building,  
are deeply moved by his devotion.  
We offer up our prayers for his protection."

Honoured MacSwiney!

Dear sons of Ireland,

the spirit of freedom will ever stand by you,  
for you stand by one another,  
you are the incarnation of freedom!

October 13

## II

*Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell,*

*And Freedom shrieked — as Kosciuszko fell!*

Terence MacSwiney, Irish patriot!

Today is the 22nd of October!

(Never has the calendar on the wall so fixed my attention!)

Are you still alive, locked in your prison cell?

Came a cable of the 17th from London:

It was sixty-six days since your fast began,

and yet you bear yourself as well as ever.

You talked for a while with your dear ones on the afternoon of  
the 17th,

and your face was even more radiant than before.

Your strength was failing daily . . .

and today is the 22nd of October.

Irish patriot, Terence MacSwiney!

Can you still be counted among living creatures?

A cable of the 17th from your native Cork

told that a Sinn Féiner, comrade of yours, Fitzgerald,

fasted for sixty-eight days in Cork City Gaol,

and suddenly died at sundown on the 17th.

Cruel deaths there are in history, but few so tragic.

The Shouyang Mountain of Ireland! The Po-yi and Shu-chi<sup>1</sup> of  
Ireland!

The next cable I dread to read. . . .

October 22

<sup>1</sup> Po-yi and Shu-chi were two lords of the Shang dynasty (c. 16th-11th century B.C.). When Chou overthrew the Shang dynasty, they disdained to eat the food of Chou, hid themselves on Shouyang Mountain and lived on wild herbs. Subsequently they died of hunger.

### III

*O sacred Truth! Thy triumph ceased a while,  
And Hope, thy sister, ceased with thee to smile.*

Now arrives a cable of the 21st:

Three times MacSwiney has fainted.

His sister has sent a telegram to his friends,

hoping that the citizens have offered prayers for her brother.

She prays that he may die the sooner, and his agony be ended.

Who could bear to read to the end these heart-breaking words?

Who could restrain his tears?

Bestial murderous government, are you bent on casting an indelible stain on the history of the world?

Cruel, callous Englishmen, has the blood of Byron and Campbell ceased to flow in your veins?

Lustreless moon, would that our sombre earth

might on the instant be turned like you to ice!

October 24

### IV

*Truth shall restore the light by Nature given,  
And, like Prometheus, bring the fire of Heaven!*

The mighty ocean is sobbing its sad lament,  
the boundless abyss of the sky is red with weeping,  
far, far away the sun has sunk in the west.

Brave, tragic death! Death in a blaze of glory! Triumphant procession of a victor! Victorious death!

Impartial God of Death! I am grateful to you! You have saved the MacSwiney for whom my love and reverence know no bounds!

MacSwiney, fighter for freedom, you have shown how great can be the power of the human will!

I am grateful to you, I extol you; freedom can henceforth never die!

The night has closed down on us, but how bright is the moon. . . .

October 27

In these four stanzas were crystallized the hot tears shed by me during those days. At the head of each stanza are lines quoted from the *Downfall of Poland* of the Scottish poet, Thomas Campbell (1777-1844). They may be read in conjunction with "The Glory That Was Greece" from *Don Juan*, and "Fair Greece! Sad Relic" from *Childe Harold* of Byron. Byron fought for an independent Greece; the struggle ended in defeat in which Byron died. Campbell gave money many times to aid Poland. The two poets rival each other in nobility of spirit. Poland and Greece are now reborn, and Byron and Campbell are no longer living, but there is a second Poland in the West and a second Greece in the East. May the spirit of Byron and Campbell "Once again to Freedom's cause return"!

## *Venus*

I would compare your enchanting lips  
to a wine-cup.

I would be intoxicated time without number  
from its inexhaustible nectar.

I would compare your breasts  
to two grave mounds.

Were we two to sleep in these graves  
our blood would change to sweet dew.

1919

## *Parting*

The curved arc of the waning moon  
hangs yet in the sky.  
The red disc of the sun  
has long emerged from the east.  
I went to see her off,  
went on the bridge over Asahigawa River.  
The current below sang its sad song.  
My soul responded,  
sang to me this song:

Moon!  
You are like a golden comb.  
I would like to climb up to the sky,  
pluck you down,  
and with my hand  
I would set you in her hair.  
Oh my dear!  
The sky is so far away,  
how could I climb up there?  
The sky is so far away,  
but even if I could climb up there,  
O, my love,  
where are you now?

Sun!  
You are laurels for a poet.  
I would like to climb up to the sky,  
to take hold of you,  
and with her hands  
place you on my head.  
O, my dear!  
The sky is so far away,

how could I ever climb up there?  
The sky is so far away,  
but even if I could climb up there,  
O, my love,  
where are you now?

The curved arc of the waning moon  
hangs yet in the sky.  
The red disc of the sun  
has long emerged from the east.  
I went to see her off,  
went on the bridge over Asahigawa River  
The current below sang its sad song.  
My soul responded,  
sang to me this song.

March-April 1919

## *Spring Sadness*

Is it that melancholy is 'clouding my mind?  
Or is it the desolate bleakness of the sky?  
How is it that the spring sunlight  
is so drear and bereft of brilliance?  
Why do the hills on yonder shore  
bow their heads in frowning dejection?  
The air is filled with the beat of the waves on the shore.  
O sea! to whom are you speaking?  
But I can make nothing of the words of the sea,  
for me the flight of the white clouds has no meaning.

March-April 1919

## *New Moon and White Clouds*

Moon! You are like a gilded sickle.  
You have felled the fir-trees on this sea,  
yes, and I too have been felled by you!

White clouds! Are you, I wonder, cool ice to slake the thirst?  
Oh that I could swallow you down my throat  
and quench the fires that rage in my breast!

Written between summer and autumn, 1919

## *Egret*

Egret! Egret!  
Where have you flown from,  
where are you flying to?  
You describe an ellipse against the sky,  
then in an instant you swoop down to the sea.  
Again you fly up into the sky,  
then again you swoop down to the sea,  
yet again you fly up into mid-air.  
Snowy-white egret!  
Where can you be flying to?

Written between summer and autumn, 1919

## *Spring Silkworms*

Silkworms, you are spinning silk. . . .

No, it is poetry you are spinning!<sup>1</sup>

How gossamer your poetry, how charming, how delicate, how  
pure, how sparkling,

how very . . . why I can find no words to describe you!

Silkworms, your poetry —

is it premeditated or unprompted?

Do you create with art, or is it a natural flow?

Do you make it for others,

or for yourselves alone?

Silkworms, I am afraid that your poetry

is, alas, spontaneous,

is, alas, a natural flow.

The Palace of Art you are erecting,

is, alas, for yourselves alone.

<sup>1</sup> Play on *sbib* (poetry) and *ssu* (silk).

## *Night Song of a Misanthropist*

Boundless sea of the sky!  
Quicksilver bubble!  
Above, the clear flow of the River of Stars,  
below, the molten crystal of the surge.  
Now is the time when all living things sleep.  
Alone, cloaked in the plumes of the white peacock,  
far away, far away fleeing,  
I raise my head in an ivory skiff.  
Not for me to ape the *chiao jen*,<sup>1</sup> weeping pearls for tears,  
to return to the sombre depths and by these tears eke out a life.  
No! Rather in this dim silvery radiance,  
like the fallen star,  
trail my evanescent glory,  
plunge deep down to "Eternity."  
Forward! . . . Forward!  
Let me not disappoint the moon before me!

November 23, 1920

<sup>1</sup> A legendary man living in the water. Every drop of his tears turns into a pearl.

## *Moonlight After Rain*

Wanly your glimmer  
bathes the woods by the sea;  
the lonely depths of the woods  
drip still with the fresh rain of twilight.

Pearly face of the poplar avenue,  
you lead onwards before me in your level sweep,  
guide me to the silent shore;  
wafts of secret fragrance caress me.

A slight chill comes over me:  
you wrapped in those layers of cloudy raiment,  
you, whose sphere is faultlessly round,  
lend me, I pray you, of your pure silk garments.

I have no sleep in my eyes:  
you who delight to swathe yourself in misty draperies,  
you silent abysmal silver ocean,  
attune to me the secret music of your waves.

## *Bright Morning*

Over the pool are young willows,  
under the willows a long shelter;  
in the shelter are seated my son and I.  
On the pool are reflected sun and clouds.

Cockcrow, bird-call, parrot-screech  
run on like a crystal stream;  
butterflies flutter hither and thither,  
the mud swallow darts hither and thither.

Dead leaves lurch as they fall,  
float down into the pool;  
green leaves swing in the air,  
give off a silvery gleam above us.

A white bird  
dances into the centre of the pool:  
ah, a whole lagoon of splintered jade!  
Unending rushbeds beyond.

# *On the Shore*

## *I*

The breeze on the shore  
already blows cool and mild;  
the distant merging of sea and sky  
is but a red trace of sunset.  
The sea has emerald depths,  
its deep silence cuts off all tumult from me.  
In the green heathland  
I move with slow footsteps:  
alone the disturbed frogs scurry off.  
Here and there are fishermen's cottages,  
cool beads of light spring out from them.  
A dazzling moon  
shines down from the lonely depths of the sky.  
Seated on a broken hulk on the shore  
I play a small harmonica:  
a plaintive melody  
seems to fill the pure vault of the sky.  
Body and soul are as though fused into one.

July 26, 1920

## *II*

The sky is now growing dusky,  
I remain a solitary figure,  
I sit in the fishing-boat on the shore,  
gazing upon the white radiance of the moon,  
the unfathomable depths of the blue abyss above,

the unfathomable depths of the sea of the sky.  
The clamorous waves in the bay  
toss and churn savagely behind me.  
Poseidon!  
Could you not give a thrust to this boat for me,  
and launch me on the sea of the sky?

July 27, 1920

### III

The lead-grey roofs of the fishermen's cottages  
gleam darkly with a circle of red flame:  
now crimson . . . now madder  
now orange . . . now gold.  
It is as ever the white radiance of the moon.  
"On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.  
The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is  
boisterous.  
On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts  
and dances."<sup>1</sup>  
Again I sit on the broken hulk on the shore.  
My little Ah-ho  
joins with a troop of children;  
they play together on the sands.  
Reciting this poem of Tagore  
I go and play with them.  
Ah! If only I could become a pure child!

July 29, 1920

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Collected Poems and Plays*, MacMillan, 1950, p. 51.

## *Stirrings of Morning*

Morning, pale as moonlight,  
penetrates the serried depths of the wood:  
scattered shadows interlace confusedly on the silvery sand.

Clear the sea beyond the pines,  
far, very far, shapes of islands loom hazily,  
clinging still, one might think, to last night's dream.

Holding my boy by the hand, slowly I walk,  
strings of my ears stir to the symphony of cockcrow, bird-call;  
strings of my heart gently give off a sympathetic note.

## *Stirrings of Spring*

Seated alone by the north window I look all round.  
In the womb of nature spring is stirring.

Far away the sea gleams with a faint iridescence;  
now it is purple, now deep blue, now a tender green.

Light and shade play on the yellow plain  
as if swept by a searchlight.

The depths of the sky are a jade blue flecked with scudding  
clouds,  
white clouds whose chyle-tinted edges almost dazzle the eye.

Down below I see a white cock with a soft crimson comb.  
Its long drawn-out call has now a note of tiredness.

Some dappled hens are settled in the nearby sand.  
These young ladies have an air of languid indolence.

The sea breeze is just enough to ruffle the cock's tail.  
It has already pressed the gentlest of stolen kisses on my cheeks  
and away it steals.

From the lonely waste land comes intermittent bird-song  
and the white clouds have now sped away.

Suddenly a white sail comes into view on the sea  
and in a moment it, too, has sped away.

February 26

## *Wedding at Sundown*

The setting sun, veiled in rose-tinted gauze,  
is round as a full moon, silent and pensive.

The sea, too, that loves her, affects an outward calm,  
but the pale green of his silks cannot hide the tumult in his heart.

Some delightful young girls, chattering and laughing,  
prepare the joyful feast on the dry heathland.

At last the bride, her full cheeks flushed with crimson,  
is taken into her sweetheart's embrace.

February 28

## *Sunrise Seen from a Boat*

Leaden circle of sky,  
indigo ocean,  
an empty expanse meets the eye:  
only aimless movement, lonely wastes.  
Black smoke bellying up  
like an evil demon.

The clouds are suffused with gold,  
there is a claw scratch in the sky.  
See that black sea-bird,  
whither is it winging its way?

My heart might be  
a model for intoxication;  
I stand at the rail  
and spit bile.

Sun!

Rounded crystalline ear-ring  
at the meeting of sky and sea,  
you swing up and down over the black cloud.

It's not easy to get a glimpse of you.

Sing for me a triumphal ode.

All things considered, I've won my victory over the sea today!

April 3

## *Estuary of the Whampoa*

Peaceful village,  
land of my fathers,  
so green those grassy shores,  
so straw-pale the flow of the water.

I lean on the rail and look into the distance:  
level like an ocean is the great country,  
but for a few heaving willows  
not a hill or cliff hinders the view.

The little craft ride up and down,  
the men might be in a dream.  
Peaceful village,  
land of my fathers.

April 3

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